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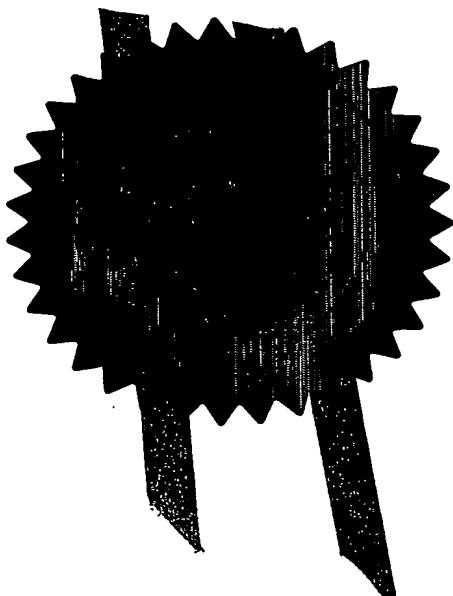
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1. Your reference

589GB

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2. Patent application number

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0308149.4

3. Full name, address and postcode of the or of each applicant (*underline all surnames*)
 Renishaw plc  
 New Mills  
 Wotton-under-Edge  
 Gloucestershire, GL12 8JR

2691002

United Kingdom

Patents ADP number (*if you know it*)

If the applicant is a corporate body, give the country/state of its incorporation

4. Title of the invention

Probe For Sensing The Position Of An Object

5. Name of your agent (*if you have one*)

Jackson, John Timothy et al

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 Number of earlier application      Date of filing  
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Yes

- a) *any applicant named in part 3 is not an inventor, or*
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**PROBE FOR SENSING THE POSITION OF AN OBJECT**

This invention relates to probes for sensing the position of an object. It may be used on position-sensing apparatus such as machine tools, coordinate measuring machines, measuring robots and the like.

Particularly in numerically controlled machine tools, it is known to exchange a cutting tool for a position-sensing probe. The probe may for example be of the touch trigger type, such as shown in US Patent No. 4,153,998 (McMurtry), which is incorporated herein by reference. Such a probe has a workpiece-contacting stylus and issues a trigger signal when the stylus contacts a workpiece. Alternatively, the probe may be of the "analogue" or "measuring" or "proportional" type, which provides an output which is a measure of the deflection of the stylus relative to a body of the probe. Rather than having a workpiece-contacting stylus, any of these types of probe may instead sense the workpiece using optical, capacitive, inductive (e.g. using eddy currents) or other non-contact techniques. The present invention may be used with any of these and with other types of probes.

Since such a probe for use in machine tools is exchangeable with cutting tools, it can be difficult to provide wires or cables to connect the probe's output signal to the controller of the machine. Consequently, various wireless signal transmission techniques are used, including inductive transmission, optical transmission and radio transmission. The probe then needs to be battery powered. To conserve battery life,

it is desirable that the probe should only be switched on when in use.

A known technique for switching on such a probe is 5 described in US Patent No. 4,599,524 (McMurtry), which is incorporated herein by reference. Here, after the probe has been inserted in the spindle of a machine tool, its battery is switched on by a brief rotation of the spindle. A centrifugal switch within the probe 10 responds to such rotation. After use, the battery may be disconnected by a further such rotation, or by a delay element within the circuit of the probe which times out after a predetermined period of non-use of the probe.

15 Probes using such centrifugal switches have been successful commercially, but the centrifugal switches used are fairly bulky. Consequently, if a probe having a small physical size is required, such centrifugal switches cannot be used, and it has been necessary to 20 use other methods for switching the probe on. A further problem with such centrifugal switches is that they are relatively expensive.

25 In broad outline, one aspect of the present invention replaces such a centrifugal switch with a sensor which is sensitive to linear acceleration. In a preferred embodiment the sensor is in the form of a switch, but other linear acceleration sensors may also be used. 30 Linear acceleration sensors are available commercially, for example as switches intended for automotive use, and may be smaller and cheaper than the centrifugal switches used in the prior art. Accelerometers which

provide a signal proportional to the acceleration may also be used.

Thus, the present invention provides a probe for 5 sensing the position of an object on position-sensing apparatus, comprising:

an electric circuit responsive to the probe attaining a sensing relationship with the object; a power supply for energising said circuit; 10 a sensor responsive to movement of the probe and arranged to cause the power supply to be connected to said circuit when movement is detected; characterised in that said sensor is responsive to linear acceleration.

15 Preferably said sensor is positioned in the probe such that it is also responsive to rotation. Thus, after the probe has been inserted into a rotatable spindle of the position sensing apparatus, it can be rotated in 20 order to activate the sensor and switch on the probe.

Where rotation is used to operate the sensor, a further problem may arise in practice, as follows. The probe may also be subjected to linear accelerations, which 25 could activate the sensor at unwanted times. This may for example arise during the exchange of the probe between the spindle of the position-sensing apparatus and a tool storage magazine, or when such a storage magazine itself moves while the probe is stored in it.

30 Consequently, in a preferred feature of the invention, the linear acceleration sensor is connected to a discriminating circuit for discriminating between linear acceleration and rotation, connecting the power

supply to the sensing circuit only when rotation is detected.

The centrifugal switch described in US Patent No. 5 4,599,524 is designed for use in a machine tool with a spindle which rotates about a vertical axis. This leads to a further problem: it is not always reliable if used in a machine tool having a spindle which rotates about a horizontal axis. The same would be true if a linear acceleration sensor were used in a horizontal spindle machine. This is because gravity varies the acceleration experienced by the sensor over the cycle of the rotation about the horizontal axis. At the bottom of the rotation, gravity acts in a radially outwards direction, while at the top it acts in a radially inwards direction. A centrifugal or other acceleration-sensitive switch would tend to switch off for part of the cycle and on for another part. Other types of acceleration sensor would be similarly affected.

A further aspect of the invention provides a probe for sensing the position of an object on position-sensing apparatus, comprising:

25       an electric circuit responsive to the probe attaining a sensing relationship with the object;       a power supply for energising said circuit;       a sensor responsive to rotation of the probe and arranged to cause the power supply to be connected to 30       said electric circuit when rotation is detected;       characterised in that said sensor is connected to a rotation-discriminating circuit which detects whether a signal indicating rotation is received from the sensor over a period or periods of time corresponding

to only a part or parts of a full revolution of the probe.

Thus, preferred embodiments of this further aspect of  
5 the present invention improve the reliability of both  
centrifugal and linear acceleration sensors when used  
to detect rotation on horizontal spindle machines,  
where the sensor may give a signal for only part of a  
full revolution.

10

In one preferred embodiment of this further aspect of  
the invention, the sensor may again be a switch.

In either aspect of the invention, the sensor may also  
15 be arranged to disconnect the power supply from said  
electric circuit which is responsive to the probe  
attaining a sensing relationship, when a further  
rotation or other movement of the probe is detected.  
Alternatively, a timer may be provided which  
20 disconnects the power supply a predetermined period  
after it was connected, or after a predetermined period  
of non-use of the probe.

Preferably the power supply is a battery.

25

Preferred embodiments of the present invention will now  
be described by way of example, with reference to the  
accompanying drawings, wherein:

Fig 1 schematically illustrates a probe installed  
30 in a machine tool;

Fig 2 is a vertical cross-section of part of the  
probe of Fig 1;

Fig 3 is a horizontal section on the line III-III  
in Fig 2;

Fig 4 is a schematic circuit diagram of part of the circuitry within the probe; and

Figs 5,6, 7 and 8 are flow charts of parts of a program which may run in a processor contained within the circuit of Fig 4.

Referring to Fig 1, a touch trigger probe 10 has a shank 16 for insertion into a rotatable spindle 14 of a machine tool, in exchange for a cutting tool. The 10 spindle can then be moved in three dimensions (in directions X,Y,Z) relative to a workpiece (not shown) in order to bring a stylus 12 of the probe 10 into contact with various points on the surface of the workpiece. A circuit within the probe, e.g. as 15 described in US Patent No. 4,153,998, detects contact between the stylus 12 and the workpiece, and develops a trigger signal in response. The trigger signal is transmitted to an interface 18, which passes it to a CNC controller of the machine tool. This records the 20 X,Y,Z position of the spindle 14 relative to the workpiece at the time of contact, thereby enabling dimensional measurements of the workpiece to be made.

Because the probe 10 is to be exchangeable with cutting 25 tools in the spindle 14 of the machine tool, it would be difficult for its signal to be transmitted via a hard-wired connection. Consequently, the probe is battery powered and has a wireless signal transmission system. In the example shown in Fig 1, a radio 30 transmission system is used, and the signal is received by an antenna 20 connected to the interface 18. However, other wireless transmission systems for such probes are well known, including optical and inductive transmission systems, and these may equally be used.

Instead of the touch trigger probe 10, any other kind of probe may be used, including those mentioned in the introduction to this specification.

- 5 Figs 2 and 3 show more detail of the touch trigger probe 10 shown in Fig 1. The workpiece-contacting stylus 12 is connected or connectable to a stylus holder 22 within a housing 24 of the probe. The stylus holder 22 has three radially projecting rollers 26.
- 10 These seat kinematically on respective pairs of balls 28, under the biasing force of a spring 23, thereby giving the stylus 12 a precisely repeatable rest position. When the stylus 12 contacts a workpiece, it is disturbed from this rest position, breaking an
- 15 electrical circuit between the rollers 26 and balls 28. Reference should be made to US Patent No. 4,153,998 for further details of this and alternative arrangements which may be used.
- 20 Electronic circuitry to process the resulting signal is provided on a flexible printed circuit 30. As shown, this may advantageously be wrapped into a triangular shape, generally coaxial with the stylus 12 and stylus holder 22, and with the axis of rotation of the spindle
- 25 14. The flexible printed circuit 30 can either surround or be placed above the stylus holder 22. This results in a compact arrangement so that the probe can be built into a small housing 24. The electronic circuit includes the components required for processing
- 30 the trigger signal received from the circuit through the balls 28 and rollers 26, much of which is incorporated in a dedicated programmable processor or microprocessor circuit such as a programmable integrated circuit (PIC). It also includes the

components necessary for wireless transmission of the signal to the interface 18.

- For simplicity, Figs 2 and 3 show only one of the components mounted to the flexible printed circuit 30. This is a linear acceleration switch 32. A suitable type is commercially available from American Electronic Components Inc., 23590 County Road 6, Elkhart, IN 46515, U S A, as part #DD 1284. Such switches are also sold as g-switches, i.e. ones which react to g-forces. The switch is chosen, amongst other reasons, for its compact size, to facilitate building into the compact arrangement shown in Figs 2 and 3. It incorporates a ball 34 which is biased away from an adjustable contact pin 36 by a spring 38. When the probe undergoes acceleration, the ball 34 makes electrical contact with the pin 36, against the action of the spring 38, closing an electrical circuit.
- The linear acceleration switch 32 is mounted off the axis of the probe (about which it is rotatable by the spindle 14). This ensures that it reacts not only to linear accelerations, but also to rotation of the spindle 14.
- Since the probe 10 is battery powered, it is desirable to conserve battery life by only switching the probe on when it is required for use. The switch 32 is used to achieve this, in a similar manner to that in US Patent No. 4,599,524. It reacts to the acceleration experienced when the spindle 14 of the machine tool is rotated, and is used to switch the probe circuit to a fully "on" state, from a dormant or quiescent state where it merely monitors the switch 32.

Thus, the probe can be turned fully on for normal use after it has been inserted in the spindle 14, by a brief rotation of the spindle 14 under the control of the machine tool's CNC controller.

5

However, in contrast to US Patent No. 4,599,524, the switch 32 reacts not only to accelerations caused by rotation, but also to linear accelerations. For example, it could react to accelerations caused by an 10 automatic tool changer of the machine tool when the probe is inserted into or removed from the spindle 14; or to accelerations as the spindle moves normally around the workpiece; or to movements when the probe is stored, out of use, in a storage magazine or carousel 15 of the automatic tool changer. Arrangements to detect the rotation and to distinguish it from other such accelerations will now be described with reference to Figs 4, 5 and 6.

20 Fig 4 shows at 40 the PIC or other processor, which is chosen to have a low current consumption since it is permanently connected to a battery 52 or other power supply located within the probe housing 24. The PIC 40 is programmed to run a number of routines. These may 25 for example include digital filtering functions for processing the trigger signal, as described in our co-pending UK Patent Application No. 0121420.4. They may also include functions which preset modes of operation of the probe, as described in International Patent 30 Application No. WO02/063235. (UK Patent Application No. 0121420.4 and International Patent Application No. WO02/063235 are incorporated herein by reference.)

One such mode of operation, which may be preset into the probe during manufacture or upon installation, may determine whether the probe is to be switched on by the switch 32 rather than by some other means. If it is,  
5 then an output 41 of the PIC 40 causes an electronic switch 56 to apply a supply voltage from the probe's battery 52 to a resistor R1. As an alternative, the resistor R1 may receive a supply voltage directly from the output 41 of the PIC 40.

10 As shown in Fig 4, the acceleration switch 32 is connected in series with a resistor R1, across the battery 52. The switch is connected to an input line 42 of the PIC 40, so that this input is high when the  
15 switch 32 is open and low when it is closed. A simple RC filter, comprising a capacitor C1 and a resistor R2, filters transient spikes should the switch 32 close momentarily, e.g. as a result of vibration, and the resistor R1 limits the current through the switch 32.

20 Fig 5 shows schematically one of the program routines which runs within the PIC 40, called at regular intervals (every 1ms in the present example). In a step 44, the input 42 from the switch 32 is polled (at the 1ms intervals) to see whether the input is high or  
25 low. Each time it polls the switch, the routine 44 stores the resulting value in an internal memory.

A step 45 of this routine then analyses the most recent  
30 150 such stored values to determine whether or not the switch was closed on at least 33% of the preceding 150 polls. It sets or clears a flag in the memory on the basis of this, thus indicating, on a continual rolling

basis, whether the switch 32 has been closed for at least 33% of the preceding 150ms.

This defines a first time interval, with a duration of  
5 150ms, which is chosen because it is approximately the time taken for one revolution of the probe at a speed of 400 revolutions per minute. Thus, the flag will remain set if the switch 32 is closed for at least a third of each revolution of the probe. This has two  
10 effects. First, it filters any contact bounce from the switch 32. Second, it ensures that the flag will remain set, even if the probe is rotated about a horizontal axis (in a machine where the spindle 14 is horizontal). In the latter case, the switch 32 may be  
15 opened by the effect of gravity for up to half of each revolution, but the flag will remain set.

Of course, the length of this first time interval could be varied, e.g. if the probe is to be rotated at a  
20 different speed when it is to be switched on. For example, if it is to be rotated at 1000 revolutions per minute, the first time interval may be 60ms instead of 150ms. The fraction of this time interval for which the switch must be closed in order to set the flag could  
25 also be varied - for example it could correspond to a quarter or a half of one revolution.

Fig 6 shows schematically a separate routine 46, which is also called at regular intervals (e.g. every 1ms) to  
30 poll this flag. It performs an analysis to determine whether the flag has been set (high) continuously for the preceding 500ms, defining a second time interval, longer than the first. If so, it provides an output on a line 48 of the PIC (see Fig 4).

The 500ms duration of the second time interval is chosen to distinguish between deliberate rotation of the probe 10 and linear accelerations of the types exemplified above. The linear accelerations typically  
5 do not last as long as 500ms, whereas it is easy to arrange for the probe to be rotated for a period longer than 500ms. The duration of this second time interval could of course be greater or less than 500ms, depending on the duration of the linear accelerations  
10 experienced in practice.

The presence of the output on the line 48 thus indicates that the switch 32 was operated by a deliberate rotation of the spindle 14, and not by any  
15 other form of acceleration. As seen in Fig 4, it operates an electronic switch 50 to apply power from the battery 52 to the heavy power consuming circuits 54 of the probe. These include the circuit through the balls 28 and rollers 26, and the wireless signal  
20 transmission circuit which transmits the probe signal via an antenna 58 in the probe.

Fig 7 shows a program routine which may be run in the processor 40 as an alternative to the routines of Figs  
25 5 and 6. As with Figs 5 and 6, this routine is called at regular intervals, e.g. once every 1ms.

The first step 73 of this routine polls the switch 32 (at the 1ms intervals). A step 74 then determines  
30 whether the input from the switch is high or low, indicating whether the switch 32 is open or closed. If it is closed, a step 76 increments an internal software register kept in the memory of the processor 40.

- Irrespective of whether the input from the switch 32 was high or low, in step 78 a software counter is incremented. A step 80 then tests whether the software counter has reached a count of 150. The routine only
- 5 proceeds to the further steps shown in Fig 7 if it has reached 150. If the count is less than 150, the routine exits (step 81) and takes no further action until it is called the next time, 1ms later.
- 10 Since it is incremented every 1ms, the counter in steps 78 and 80 indicates whether a first time interval of 150ms has passed. If so, then in a step 82, the routine checks the count which has been attained by the register which was incremented in step 76. It
- 15 determines whether the count in this register is equal to or greater than 50. If so, this indicates that the switch 32 has been closed for at least 33% of the 150ms first time interval, and an internal flag in the memory of the processor 40 is set (step 84). Otherwise, if
- 20 the register's count is less than 50, the flag is cleared (step 86).
- It will be appreciated that the steps 74-82, as described so far, could be used as one way of
- 25 implementing the process 45 indicated in Fig 5. However, in the present routine, the flag-setting and clearing actions taken in steps 84 and 86 differ from those of Fig 5.
- 30 Specifically, the Fig 7 routine provides not one but three such flags in the memory of the processor 40. One of these three flags is set, in turn, each time step 84 is reached. This is followed by a step 88, which determines whether all three flags have been set

in succession, on the last three successive passes of the step 84. If not, the routine merely exits at step 92 and takes no further action until it is next called 1ms later.

5

If there have been three flags in succession, step 90 outputs a signal on line 48 of the processor 40, to switch on the probe circuits 54 (see Fig 4). The routine then exits via step 92. Thus, the result is similar to that of the routine of Fig 6, except that instead of a single time period of 500ms it is determined whether flags have been set for three successive periods of 150ms (making a total of 450ms). As in Fig 6, this provides a second time interval, longer than the first, which distinguishes between deliberate rotation of the probe 10 and linear accelerations.

If, in step 82, it is determined that the register has not exceeded a count of 50 during the 150ms first time interval, then the step 86 clears all three of the flags. This indicates that the 450ms second time interval has not been achieved, so no further action is required. The routine again exits via step 92.

25

Whenever the routine exits via step 92, it is necessary to zero the register and the counter, ready for future incrementing in the steps 76 and 78. This starts a new 150ms first time interval, the next time the switch 32 is polled in step 44.

After the heavy power consuming circuits 54 have been switched on, it is also desirable to switch them off when use of the probe has finished. The method by

- which this is to be done may be one of the modes of operation which is pre-programmed into the probe and stored in the memory of the PIC 40, as described in the above-mentioned International Patent Application No. 5 WO02/063235. One such method is to detect a further deliberate rotation of the probe in the spindle 14. An alternative is for the probe to time out after a predetermined period of non-use.
- 10 Fig 8 shows a routine which runs at regular intervals in the PIC 40 for this purpose. This routine only runs when the probe circuits 54 have been switched on (i.e. line 48 is high). That condition is determined in an initial step 60, and if it is false the routine simply 15 returns without performing any of the following steps.
- In the next step 62, the routine checks the pre-programmed mode of operation, stored in the memory of the PIC 40. It determines if a "spin-off" mode has 20 been pre-programmed, i.e. whether the circuits 54 are to be switched off by a further rotation of the probe. If the answer is yes, it proceeds to a step 64. In step 64, it waits for a further rotation of the probe, determined as in Figs 5 and 6 or Fig 7. Meanwhile, 25 normal operation of the probe continues. When such a further rotation is detected, the circuits 54 are switched off by taking the line 48 of the PIC low (step 66).
- 30 If it is determined in step 62 that the probe is not in the "spin-off" mode, then the circuits 54 are instead switched off by a "time-out" mode. Here, a step 68 determines the pre-programmed duration of the time-out interval, e.g. 12s, 33s and 124s. This is a pre-

selectable value, as previously stored in the memory of the PIC 40 in accordance with International Patent Application No. WO02/063235.

5 Next, in step 70, the routine waits for the specified time-out interval. Meanwhile, normal operation of the probe continues, as in step 64. The time-out interval starts from when the probe circuits 54 were turned on. Advantageously, however, the time-out interval may be  
10 re-started each time the probe generates a trigger signal. This ensures that the probe circuits 54 are not switched off during an extended period of use of the probe. When the time-out interval expires, the circuits 54 are switched off by taking the line 48 of  
15 the PIC low (step 72).

Although not shown in Fig 8, even in the "spin-off" mode it can be desirable to provide a long time-out interval, e.g. 90 minutes, to ensure that the probe  
20 circuits 54 are eventually switched off even if no further rotation of the probe is detected in step 64.

In place of the switch 32 shown in Figs 2 and 3, other acceleration-sensitive switches or sensors may be used.  
25 For example, a mercury switch may be used. It may be normally closed, opening when acceleration takes place (in contrast to the normally open switch 32). Step 45 of Fig 5 should then check to see if the switch has  
30 been opened, rather than closed. Technically such an arrangement works well, but mercury switches have environmental disadvantages.

Alternatively, linear acceleration switches formed from micro-machined silicon (MEMS) may be used. As previously mentioned, another alternative is to use an accelerometer which provides a signal proportional to 5 the acceleration, with appropriate processing of the signal provided either electronically or by software in the PIC 40.

1/5

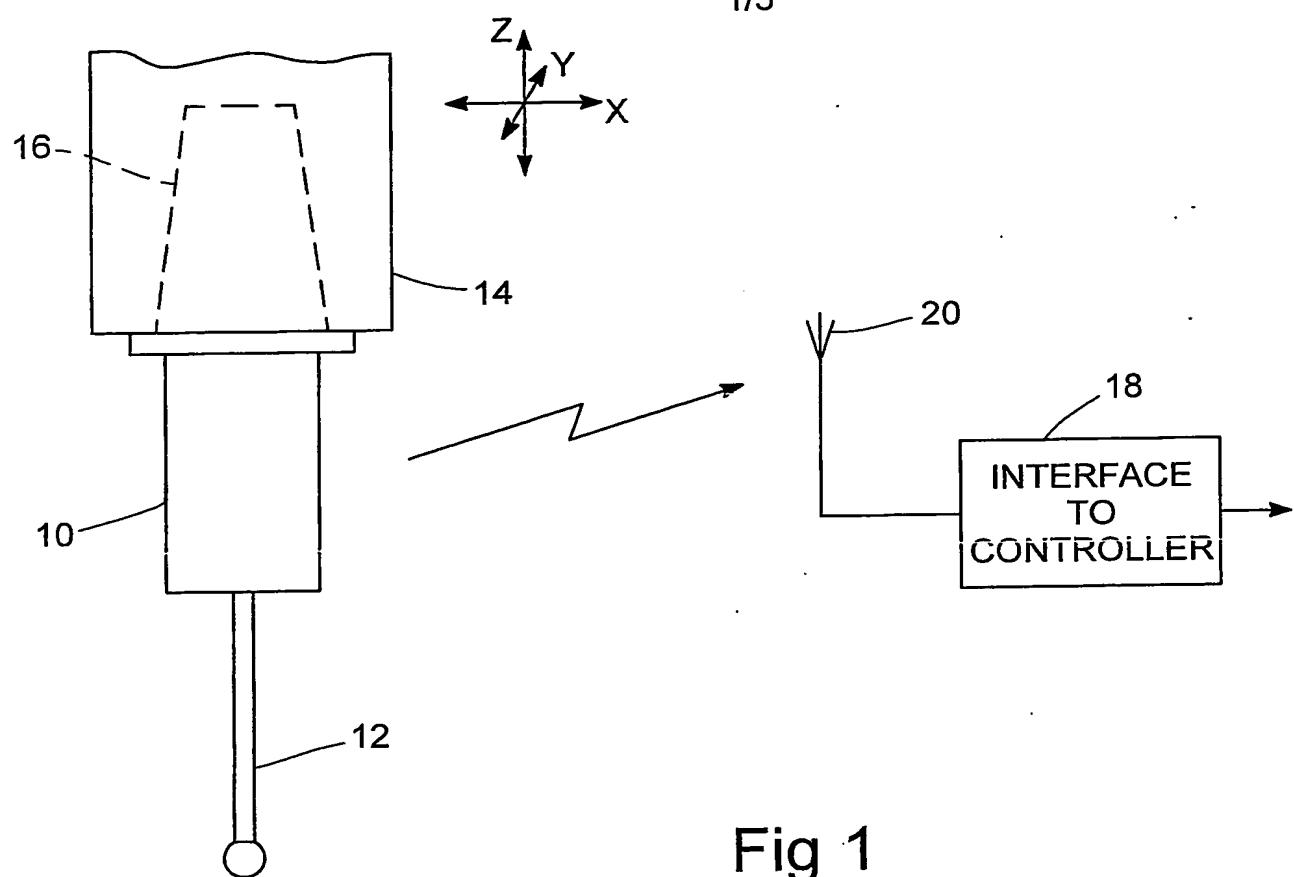


Fig 1

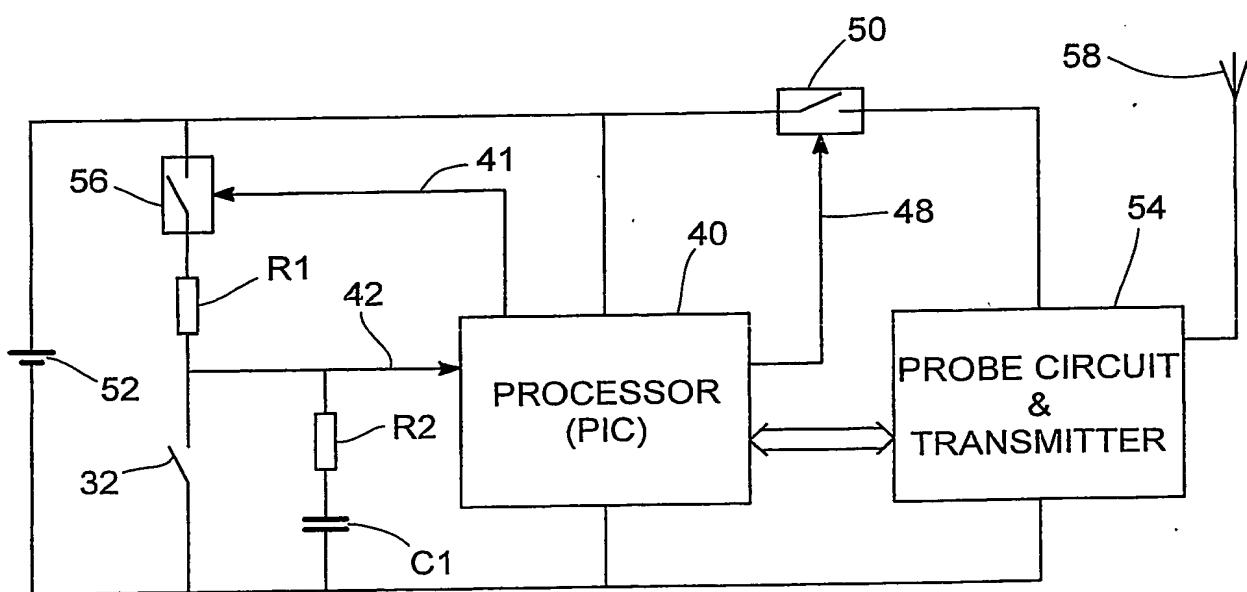


Fig 4

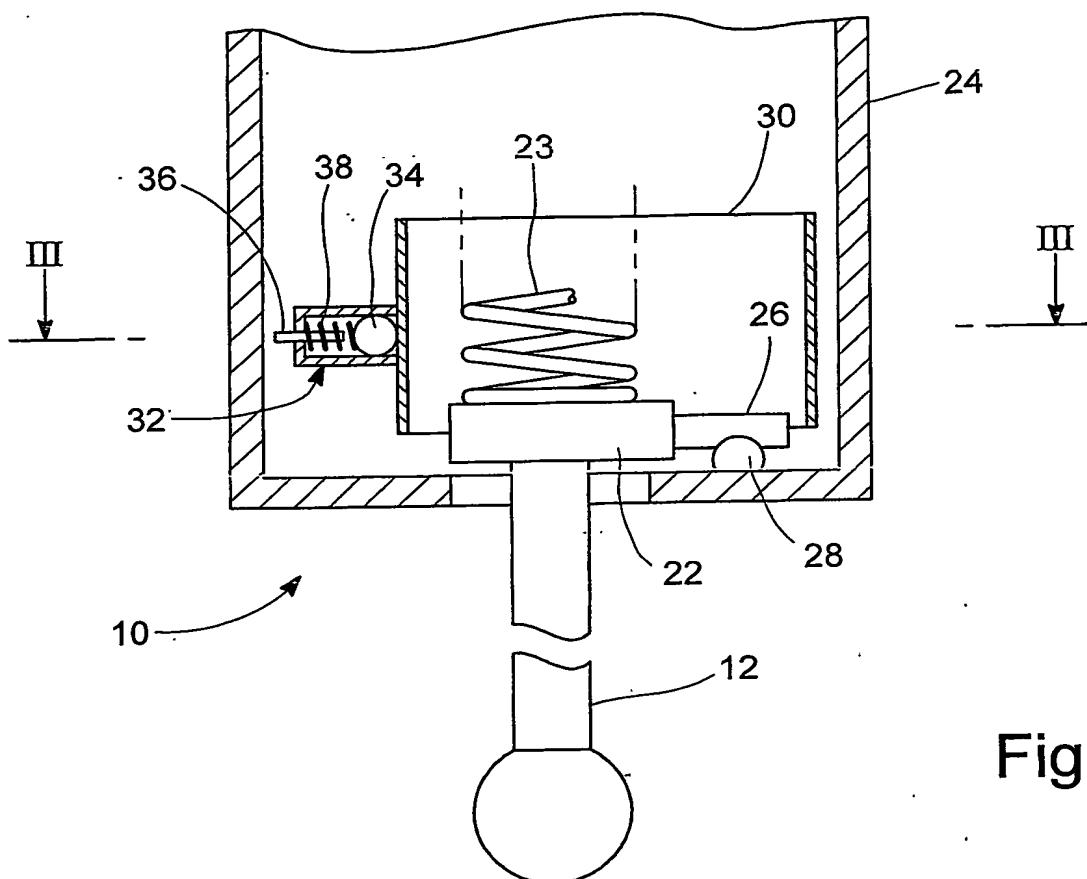


Fig 2

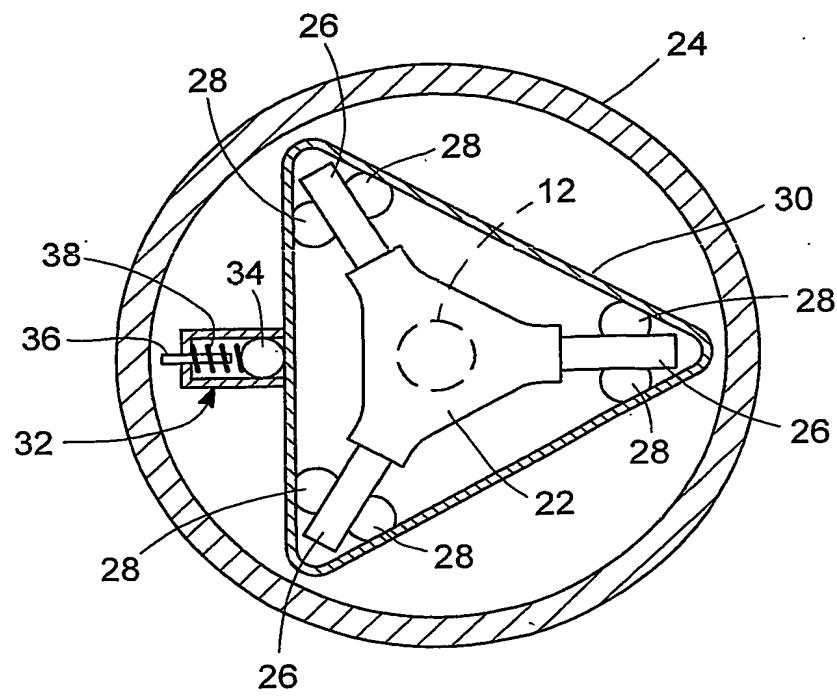


Fig 3

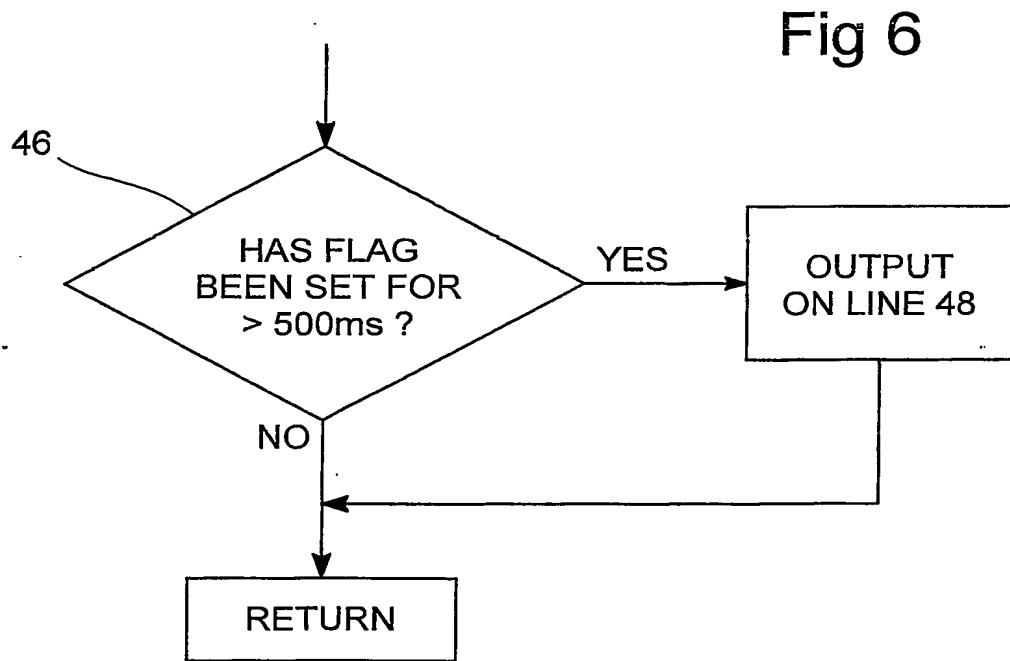
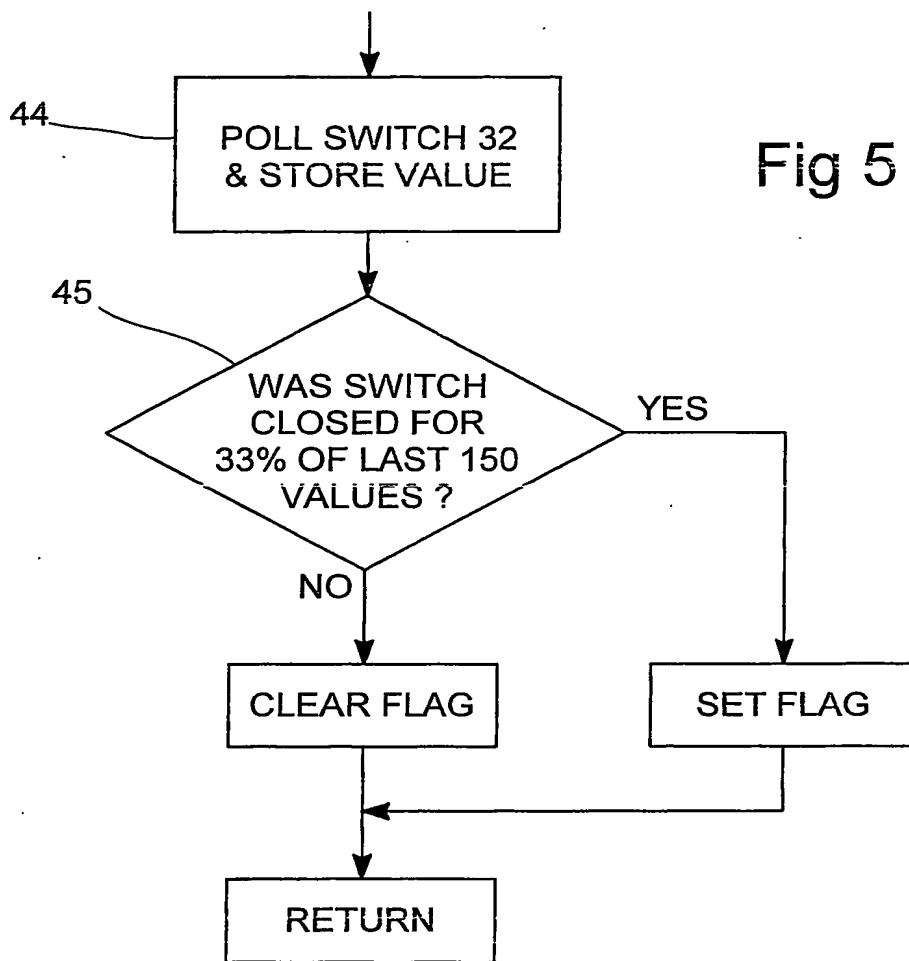
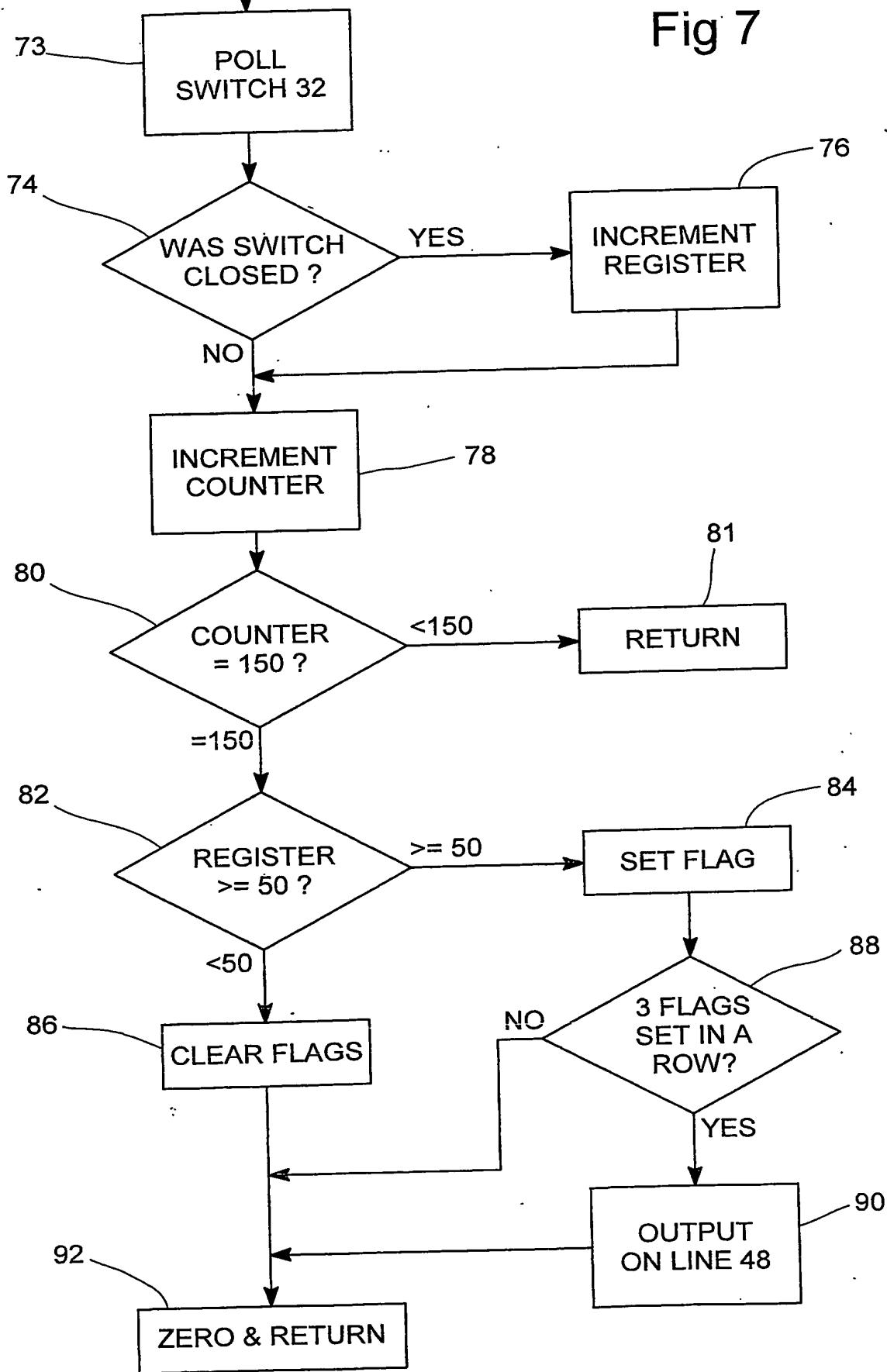
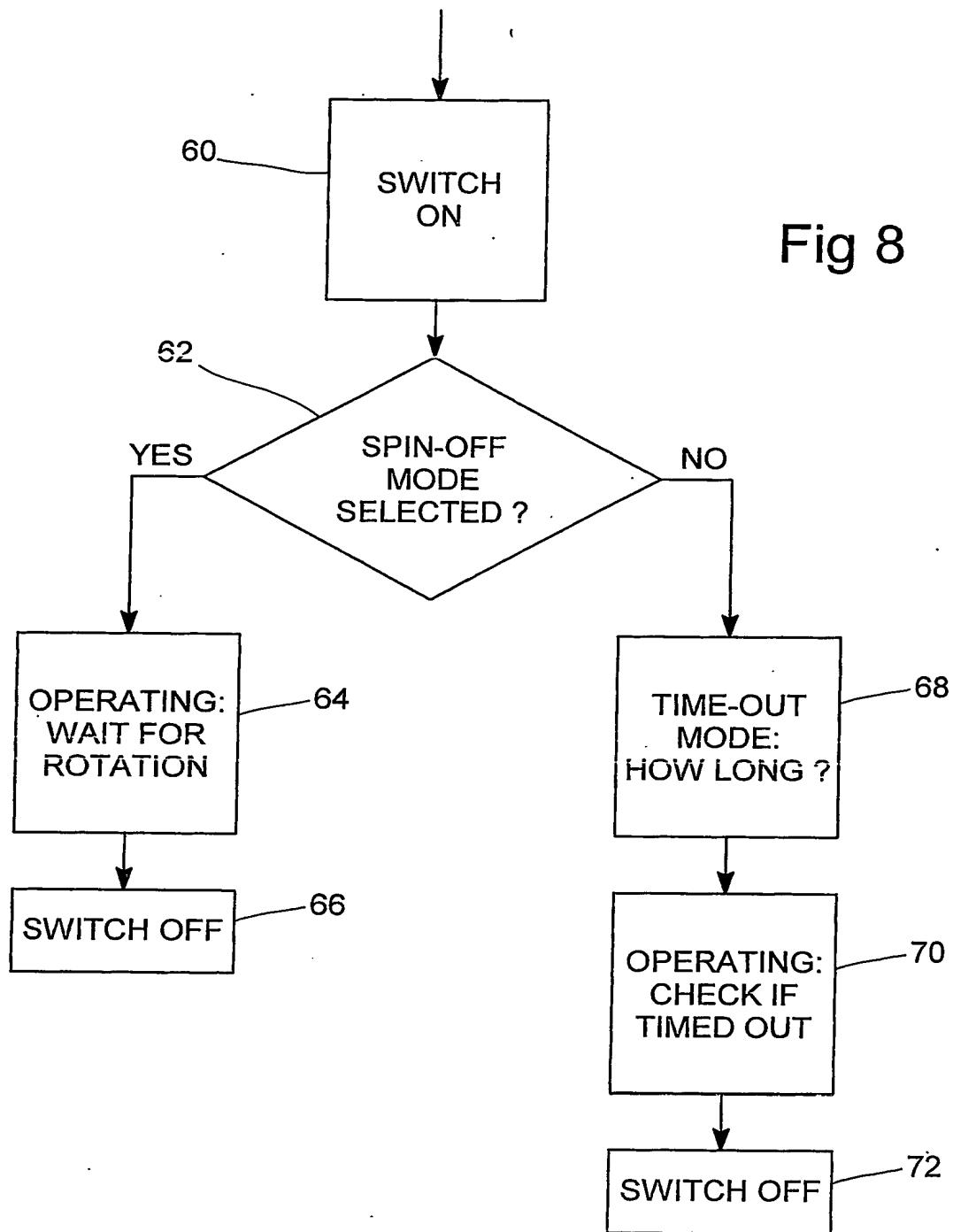


Fig 7





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